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Question1: There should be ongoing mechanisms to support farmers in transition. Farmers that continue practices without changes to market and regulatory environments will face failure ...but many changes will cost resources that may not be readily available. Programs through rural development or extension need to be made available without going through an extensive competitive process. There has been much focus on land ...land alone does not result in successful farming.

Question2: Value added marketing must be a core policy within the US Ag Program. A multitude of products produced from every crop grown or livestock raised will give our farmers a competitive edge in the marketplace and ready to respond to shifts in global trends. Products should always be in the pipeline ready to be launched as market forces change.

There should also be mechanisms to protect US agriculture from foreign pests and diseases. Countries that have pests and diseases not known to occur in the US should have strict requirements for shipment into the country --this should be a part of trade policy. The expense should be borne by the originating country and not be forced on USDA for funding. USDA should have a strong program to identify protocols and inspection procedures to ensure that the conditions are met. Until such time, APHIS needs to be strengthened or US farmers will be weakened as new pests and diseases come in and tools to combat them are difficult to obtain due to our strict regulatory climate.

Question3: Current limitations on AGI provides disadvantages to large agricultural operations that need assistance. Farms that are legitimate agricultural enterprises should be eligible for all programs. While there is a need to meet the needs of the small farmer, total focus on that group and neglect of the larger enterprises that provide export and other large revenue streams to the country does not seem right. Proof of return on investment should be the qualifying factor and the level of assistance relative to the potential in agricultural expansion resulting from the benefits provided.

Commodity crops that face international competition should be favored for eligibility of programs to develop transitional agricultural options.

Question4: Conservation and Environmental programs within the Farm Bill should be directly related to production agriculture. Farmers should not expect to make more money from Conservation programs without increases in agricultural production. This will result in farming as a secondary role to open space...Conservation and Environmental initiatives relative to open space should be left to the jurisdiction of EPA.

In the interest of "conservation", there appears to be a lack of

recognition of the importance of water to have good agricultural operations. The farm bill must address the farmers need of reliable and affordable water.

Question5: There was a time when rural paralleled farms. Now it is not so. Many rural areas are not production farms but rather lifestyle farms. Scarce funding within the USDA should not be used to subsidize lifestyle farming. A clear distinction must be made between rural lifestyle and those rural areas that are in production agriculture. Rural development programs within the USDA should focus on agricultural areas in those that will result in more successful farmers.

Different regions within the United States have different challenges. The Farm Bill must recognize regional differences and address the various needs to ensure a sound agricultural sector in every region within the country.

Question6: It should be a very significant part of the Farm Bill with emphasis on value added product research, development and marketing. This area should include addressing sustainable energy development. The memorandum of understanding between DOE and USDA must be implemented.

Existing programs through the land grant system is critical for many small rural communities. Shifting programs to a competitive system will create an undue burden to these areas and favor large institutions with professional grant writers. Agriculture is in rural areas and the program should put money into helping farmers. Having universities expend resources applying for grants that may not materialise while having farmers withering on the vine does not make sense. Close collaboration between rural development and extension to develop regionally appropriate programs is important.